DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 432 TM 014 448

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TITLE	Integrating Testing with Teaching. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-TM-89-7
PUB DATE	Nov 89
CONTRACT	RI-88062003
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Attitudes; *Educational Testing; Elementary Secondary Education; School Administration; Standardized Tests; Teacher Attitudes; *Teaching Methods; *Test Use
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the integration of teaching and testing. The use of tests as instructional tools and administrative tools is discussed as well as teacher and administrator attitudes toward testing and teacher competency in interpreting test results. The term "tests" covers standardized tests of achievement and aptitude, less formal paper-and-pencil tests, performance tests, and the like. To link testing directly to teaching, tests can be used at the beginning of the school year to gain an overview of student knowledge, in decisions about grouping students in the classroom, in diagnoses of each student's knowledge, and in attempts to determine the appropriate pace of classroom instruction. Tests can be used to make student promotion and retention decisions, to share information with parents and other non-student stakeholders, and to measure the effectiveness of instruction and learning. Teachers generally seem to be more supportive of testing than is indicated by the literature, and teachers' attitudes seem to be a function of their experience and knowledge. Superintendents report a higher level of satisfaction with use of tests by practitioners for decision making than do measurement specialists. Students favor frequent testing, but while most of them want to know the results of their tests, less than half want to discuss them with their teachers. A short reading list is appended. (TJH)

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Integrating Testing With Teaching

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Testing and teaching are not separate entities. Teaching has always been a process of helping others to discover "new" ideas and "new" ways of organizing that which they learned. Whether this process took place through systematic teaching and testing, or whether it was through a discovery approach, testing was, and remains, an integral part of teaching.

This digest discusses ways teaching and testing can be integrated. Just as there is no "best" teaching method, neither is there only one best approach to testing. The digest discusses the use of tests as an instructional tool, the use of tests as an administrative tool, teacher attitudes towards testing, and teacher competency with regard to testing.

The term "test" is viewed here as any of a variety of techniques that can capture what a person knows in response to a question. This includes standardized tests of achievement and aptitude, less formal paper-and-pencil tests, performance tests, and the like. Tests, whatever form they take, require a response that is considered "correct." Measures of attitude, personality, and interest would not fall under this definition.

In What Ways Can Testing Be Linked To Teaching?

- Testing is a useful tool at the beginning of the school year.

  It can help a teacher gain an overview of what students bring to new instruction. Test results early in the school year can help the teacher plan review material and identify potential issues to be faced. Examining past test results can help a teacher who is new to a specific school assess the school setting that he or she will work in.

- Testing can aid in decisions about grouping students in the class.

  If the teacher has specified instructional objectives, testing can yield information that will aid the teacher in assigning specific students to instructional groups. The teacher can change the groups later after more teaching and testing has taken place.

- Testing can be used to diagnose what individual pupils know.

  No one source of data can be sufficient to assess what a pupil knows about school-related content. What is called for is a triangulation of several kinds of data drawn from various types of tests: standardized tests of achievement and aptitude, teacher-made quizzes, observations of behavior, and the like. Diagnosis does not necessarily mean prescription unless the data collected have demonstrated high reliability and validity.

- Testing can help the teacher determine the pace of classroom instruction.

  Teachers tend to use tests that they prepared themselves much more often than any other type of test to monitor what has been previously learned. These tests may take the form of oral questioning of the class or individual students, or paper-and-pencil tests. Systematic observations of a student applying a skill can be thought of as a form of performance testing. Testing used in these ways are a prerequisite for determining how quickly new material can be presented. These tests help the teacher gain a perspective of the range of attained learning as well as individual competence.

In What Ways Can Testing Be Used To Help Teachers and Administrators?

- Tests can be used to help make promotion and retention decisions.

  Many factors enter into the important decision of moving a student into the next grade. Intuition is an important part of any decision but that intuition is enhanced when coupled with data. Standardized

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tests, and records of classroom performance on less formal tests are essential for supplying much of the data upon which these decisions are based.

- Test results are important devices to share information with boards of education, parents, and the general public through the media.

  Classroom instruction depends upon a large support network. That network needs information if an adequate support level is to be maintained. Tests in various forms can supply that information. Informational needs vary among the support groups; specialized referrals for remediation and enrichment need test data for parental support and approval; effectiveness of educational planning is needed by boards of education: evidence which can be partially supplied by test data; financial support of existing programs by the general community needs evidence that can be supplied by test data.

- Test results are useful tools for measuring the effectiveness of instruction and learning.

  Various types of tests can be employed when measuring how effectively teaching impacts student learning. Learning when viewed in the aggregate can be viewed within a district at three levels; district, building, and classroom. Standardized tests are particularly useful at all three levels. These tests can be used in norm, criterion and objective-referenced modes. Tests written within the district for large-scale use can also supply information focused specifically on unique, local aspects of educational programs.

What Appear To Be Teachers' and Administrators' Attitudes Towards Their Use of Tests?

- There is a gap between what teachers and administrators think, and what those who write about them say that they think about the value of testing.
- Teachers generally seem to be more supportive of testing than typified in the literature.
- Teachers attitudes are in part a function of their experience and their knowledge of testing.

  Those who are more experienced and who have had measurement training and experience in administering tests show greater support for the use of them than do those who are less experienced and less knowledgeable.

- School superintendents report a higher level of satisfaction with the use of tests for decision making than do measurement specialists whose perceptions of practitioners' attitudes tended to be more pessimistic.

What Do Students Feel About The Tests They Take?

- Students feel that frequent testing helps them retain more content, reduces test anxiety, and aids their own monitoring of their progress.
- Students report a higher level of test anxiety over teacher-made tests (64%) than over standardized tests (30%). But while 88% of the students wanted to know the results of their tests, only 44% wanted to discuss them with their teachers.

Additional Reading

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract R-88-062003. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI or the Department of Education. **Permission is granted to copy and distribute this ERIC/TM digest.**